

VZCZCXRO1516
RR RUEHPA
DE RUEHBP #0355/01 1561110
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 051110Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0402
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 0650
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAMAKO 000355

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/04/2019
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [ML](#)
SUBJECT: NORTHERN MALI'S REACTION TO EXECUTION OF BRITISH
HOSTAGE

REF: BAMAKO 00071

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary. On June 4 the Embassy sounded out several northern leaders for their reaction to AQIM's apparent execution of the British national kidnapped on January 22 along the Mali-Niger border. We spoke to four Tuareg leaders from northern Mali, one Telemsi Arab leader from the region of Gao, and one Berabiche Arab leader from Timbuktu. All described the killing as reprehensible. Angered by the murder and fearful of a potential backlash against their own interests, at least two Tuareg groups are considering communiques condemning the execution and urging the Malian government to assume responsibility for securing Malian territory. The Telemsi Arab leader we contacted, who also served as one of the many intermediaries working for the British hostages' release, appeared indifferent to any potential ramifications for his community, stating flatly that Malian Arabs had nothing to do with AQIM and were simply observers interested only in minding their own business. On the evening of June 4, however, perhaps as news of impending Tuareg statements began to circulate, he contacted the Embassy to state that Telemsi Arabs would indeed issue a statement condemning the murder. An Arab Berabiche leader from Timbuktu blamed the killing on previous ransom payments to AQIM, expressed concern that development assistance to northern Mali would now understandably dry up, and said the Berabiche were mulling over issuing a condemnation statement of their own. End Summary.

Tuareg Reaction: Damage Control

2.(C) Kidal Chamber of Commerce President and Taghat Melet Tuareg leader Abdousalam ag Assalat described the murder of the British tourist as horrible and said there was a considerable amount of outrage within the Tuareg community that AQIM could commit such an act on Malian soil. Ag Assalat speculated that someone should, in his words, "exploit" this anger as a way of solidifying public opinion against AQIM. Ag Assalat also expressed concerns of a potential backlash against local Tuareg populations as governments looking at northern Mali from afar may incorrectly assume that Tuareg populations were somehow complicit with the kidnapping and the murder of the British hostage. He said he feared that the murder would have a seriously adverse impact on the development of northern Mali.

3.(C) In the past ag Assalat has worked with other Tuareg leaders to issue statements condemning violence between Tuareg rebels and the Malian military. Several years ago ag Assalat also had a hand in statements asking what was then the GSPC to clear out of northern Mali and Tuareg territory. Ag Assalat said he intended to speak with fellow Taghat Melet

leaders and Kidal based Imams about issuing a statement condemning the murder.

4.(C) National Assembly Deputy and Ifoghas Tuareg leader Alghabass ag Intallah also said he was shocked and saddened by the execution. He held the Malian government partly responsible for the murder, and complained that local communities could have rid northern Mali of AQIM's presence had the central government not sapped all of local communities' power. He lamented the Malian government's unwillingness to create mixed military units per the Algiers Accords as these units would be well-placed to provide the sort of security currently absent in northern Mali. Alghabass said he was working with fellow Ifoghas leaders to draft a statement that would condemn the execution and urge the Malian government to take measures needed to properly secure northern Mali.

5.(C) National Assembly Deputy and spokesman for the Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) Ahmada ag Bibi described the execution as a bad sign for northern Mali and indicated that he was working with his fellow Assembly Deputy Alghabass on a statement of condemnation.

6.(C) A senior leader of the Chamanamas Tuareg community, Sikaye ag Ekawel, had a slightly different approach. Sikaye, who is from the eastern part of the region of Gao near the town of Menaka, said he was saddened by the murder but that AQIM and the murder were located a long ways from where Chamanamas Tuaregs reside. He said only a change in the Malian government's handling of AQIM could resolve the problem in northern Mali and that only a very small minority

BAMAKO 00000355 002 OF 003

of Tuaregs had contact with the terrorist organization.

Telemsi Arabs: It Ain't Me

7.(C) On the morning of June 4, Telemsi Arab leader and former National Assembly Deputy from Bourem in Gao, Mohamed ould Mataly, indicated that a statement of condemnation was not Malian Arabs' affair. Ould Mataly was deeply involved in negotiations over the fate of the British hostage (reftel). In January ould Mataly offered to put British officials in telephone contact with the British hostage - an offer the British apparently never accepted out of fear that speaking to the hostage could put them into a position of having to negotiate with terrorists. Obviously angered by British handling of the crisis, ould Mataly said the execution was "deplorable" but had nothing to do with Mali's Arab community.

8.(C) He described northern Mali as an open space, a separate country between Mali and Algeria run by Islamists and traffickers. He said that while Malian Arabs wanted peace in the north, they are nothing more than observers when it comes to AQIM and have no ability to influence the terrorist group's use of northern Mali as a safe haven. When asked if he feared that the execution could impact northern populations by scaring away development opportunities, ould Mataly questioned whether northern Malians would notice the difference given the limited number of development projects in the north currently underway. He then made a pitch for more well projects north of Gao near Bourem. On the evening of June 4 ould Mataly contacted the Embassy to say that his community did indeed plan on issuing a statement regarding the execution.

-----Q-----
Berabiche Arabs: We Saw It Coming

9.(C) Timbuktu based Berabiche leader Danna Moulaye said the execution was shameful and barbarous. He blamed the hostage

crisis and its fatal outcome on countries that previously ransomed hostages from AQIM. "Ransom payments," said Moulaye, "created all of this. If no one had given money at the start, they wouldn't have taken any other hostages." Moulaye said Berabiche in Timbuktu were very disturbed by the killing, not only because it is anathema to Malian and Berabiche culture but also because it occurred on what he regards as his land in northern Mali. He said news of the execution was still sinking in but that the Berabiche were discussing whether to issue a statement of condemnation. Moulaye also expressed concern that the killing would adversely impact innocent northern populations. Noting that he has been warning of this kind of backlash for years, Moulaye said northern Mali had not reached the point where western development workers will decide that it is not worth risking their lives for nothing to travel northward. He then added that he couldn't blame international development workers for making this calculation and that he would do the same were he in their position.

Comment: Shock and Concern in Northern Mali

10.(C) Northern leaders are shocked and saddened by news that a western tourist's trip to Mali to attend a festival celebrating Malian and Tuareg culture ended in a brutal murder, at the hands of Islamic extremists, on Malian soil. They all stressed that neither religious fanaticism nor violence have any place in Malian culture and that Malian citizens would have never sponsored such an act. Tuaregs, who have perhaps the most to lose given the international community's misguided propensity to assume that two armed groups - Tuareg rebels and AQIM - who occupy the same geographical space must therefore also be linked ideologically, are clearly concerned that Malians or international donors will conclude that they were in some way complicit with both the hostage takings and the murder. The Tuareg communiques that are apparently forthcoming are intended not only to express a genuine sense of horror with the killing but also publicly distance Tuareg communities from AQIM.

11.(C) Telemsi Arab leader Ould Mataly's reaction was slightly more curious. It may be that Ould Mataly truly believes that hostage crises are not his problem and that there is nothing he can do to undermine AQIM's position.

BAMAKO 00000355 003 OF 003

Malian Arab communities are not as organized as their Tuareg brethren, however, and it may be that neither Ould Mataly nor any other Telemsi leader has the power to unite fellow Telemsi Arabs behind one cause. The same may hold for Berabiche located in Timbuktu. The Berabiche, and perhaps the Telemsi, may find themselves shamed into publicly condemning the execution once the Tuaregs have released statements of their own. Ould Mataly's subsequent communication with the Embassy on the evening of June 4 seems to indicate exactly that.

LEONARD